

For Immediate Release

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School**

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Media Release

Pulse of CCSD – Music is not what Bill Dickinson does, but who he is

Mount Pleasant, SC – Charleston County School District (CCSD) alumni beam with pride when they recall their years in CCSD schools. They fondly remember their favorite teachers, their best classes, and the joys of whatever extra-curricular activities they participated in. Each CCSD school is different and unique, but the one common denominator is the culture. In every school, you'll find a culture of community and family.

That's what Carolina Park Elementary School's Bill Dickinson looks back on and smiles about. Dickinson, Carolina Park's 2020-2021 Teacher of the Year, is also the school's beloved music teacher. He grew up in the Lowcountry and attended Belle Hall Elementary School when it first opened, Laing Middle School (where his mother was a teacher for 18 years), and graduated from Wando High School in 1999.

Dickinson's teachers, his experiences, and his fondest memories inspired him to pursue his musical dreams, and he came home to Mount Pleasant to pay it forward.

The road back home

Dickinson graduated from the University of Georgia with a degree in Trumpet Performance and earned a Master's degree from DePaul University in Trumpet Performance. During his studies, he had the opportunity to study with members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which sparked his interest in being a full-time professional musician.

Dickinson moved to Atlanta where he was an instructor at Clark Atlanta University. In addition, he taught private trumpet lessons, worked with local band programs, and performed with professional musical groups across the Southeast.

In search of stability and less travel, Dickinson was inspired to return to full-time teaching and became a Certified Specialist in Music Education.

"I wanted to see my students on an everyday basis, rather than just once a week," said Dickinson. "I wanted to watch and actively participate in their progress."

Dickinson is in his eleventh year of teaching and has taught all age groups. As his family was beginning to grow, so was the urge to move back home. His twin brother, who also continues his musical aspirations as a local freelance trombone performer, moved back home ten years prior.

"I saw a job opening at Carolina Park and knew it was part of the Wando cluster and thought it would be an exciting and incredible opportunity," said Dickinson," said Dickinson. "I was equally inspired by my childhood music teacher, Karen Powell. She is still at Belle Hall where we met almost 30 years ago."

Dickinson explained that his musical training through CCSD was impactful at every level, but his love of music and the early confidence he gained came from Powell. She pushed him to join the band and inspired him to go into education.

"I want to be that kind of leader," said Dickinson. "I want to encourage the next generation."

According to Powell, he is.

"I am blessed to have had Bill as a student at Belle Hall and now as a colleague and friend," said Powell. "It seems like only yesterday when he was singing 'It's a Small World' on the stage with his brother, and both his mom and dad beaming in the audience with pride. His eyes sparkle now, just as they did then, with the love of music. It is indeed a joy to see a child grow into a remarkable person. He is an outstanding music educator and a remarkable person!"

"That kind of leader"

In addition to being the music teacher at Carolina Park, Dickinson collaborates with his colleagues across the district. He works with and instructs middle school musicians, teaches lessons across the district, and helps with Wando's program when needed.

Additionally, music teachers from across the district bring bands into Carolina Park and various schools to expose younger students to how great fine arts can be.

"It's about showing them the things that await them and the things they can continue on with when they head off to middle school and beyond," said Dickinson.

Dickinson explained that CCSD provides incredible teacher collaboration opportunities, and peer support systems that provide encouragement, motivation, and increased passion.

"I have made some great connections with my colleagues and working with them truly feels like home," said Dickinson. "I drive down Wando Parkway and see all the state championship signs and think how lucky I am to be able to return to an incredible fine arts community where students can thrive. It's even better than it was when I was here and the tradition is even greater and broader than when I was part of it."

Dickinson wants every child to feel like music has something to offer everyone.

"It is a fine art that is fully inclusive because it is a group effort," said Dickinson. "I teach kids how to work together," said Dickinson. "The takeaway is that any role you play in music makes the group better."

According to Principal Michael Antonelli, Dickinson does a wonderful job of cultivating a love of music for the entire school in creative and innovative ways.

"Whether it is through singing, playing ukuleles, music through technology, or less traditional means, Bill always has the students engaged, learning, and having fun," Antonelli said.

Dickinson said he wants his students to always feel as if they are a part of something much bigger than their individual success.

One example of that is the annual Veterans Day celebration. This year the school held a parade in which third grade teachers, students, and their veteran family members marched to patriotic music, holding signs and banners representing all branches of the military.

"Bill's annual Veterans Day tribute has become an event that our school community looks forward to and his creativity in continuing this tradition through the pandemic has been inspiring," added Antonelli.

"This is an example of something that could not have been accomplished without the help and participation of everyone; staff, students, and parents," added Dickinson.

The curriculum also includes music appreciation, culture exploration into music, general music, reading skills, instruments, and more.

"Music is a hands-on activity, and the goal is to encourage and pique curiosity," said Dickinson. "I want my students to explore, sing, and discover their own musical talents and interests."

That philosophy models the community at Carolina Park which is described as a melting pot of families from around the country, and in some cases, the world.

"I am super proud to be a part of it, and starting new music traditions for these students," said Dickinson. The community here is so supportive and active in their children's education and activities."

That commitment is also reflective in the school's administration, particularly Principal Antonelli.

"As a teacher and a parent, I am appreciative of Mr. Antonelli's support of teachers and students (his daughter Claire attends Carolina Park and daughter Julia will attend next year)," said Dickinson. "There is not a doubt that everything we do here is in the best interest of the students."

The culture of Coyote Nation is all about teamwork and exemplifying their P.A.C.K. - expectations of Pride, Accountability, Commitment, and Kindness.

According to Antonelli, Dickinson consistently demonstrates all of these attributes and his positive outlook on all challenging situations is commendable.

"As a teacher leader, he is always willing to approach any challenge with a willingness to solve the problem and make decisions that are in the best interest of our students and school," said Antonelli. "Bill is an amazing teacher, leader, musician, and parent and we are so fortunate that he chose to join our team here at Carolina Park Elementary."

It should have been obvious early on that Dickinson would become a music teacher. He is a third-generation teacher and he and his twin brother both found a love for music early on in their CCSD education thanks to the strong encouragement and inspiring experiences provided by their music teachers.

"I still remember the joy and excitement of going to the music room as an elementary student," said Dickinson. "I think it's only fitting that I have the opportunity to provide that for the next generation".

Dickinson and his wife Liz are glad to be raising their children in a geographic and school community that promises unforgettable memories will be made.

For more information, contact Michael Antonelli at (843) 856-8060.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all of its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 49,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science,

technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), music and other creative and performing arts, career and technical preparation programs, and military.